

The Arctic in the political discourse of Russian leaders: the national pride and economic ambitions.

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Abstract

This article explores how Arctic policy is presented in Russian political narratives. This is achieved through the discourse analysis of 109 official documents published within seven-year timeframe (2008-2015) on the official website of the Russian President. The article argues that Russian leaders emphasise the state's geographical location and significant contribution to historical exploration and environmental protection of the region to frame Russia as an 'Arctic Great Power' which has natural rights to possess and utilise the Arctic's abundant resources. The logic of 'our Arctic, our rules' can justify any necessary sacrifices, and the assertive policy of the state. However, this discursive representation of the Russian Arctic does not correlate with the reality of the country's current interests in international cooperation and its willingness to 'play by the rules'.

Key words:

Russian Arctic policy, identity-building, discourse analysis, Arctic, political discourse

Introduction

The Arctic region has been branded by the media as 'Ali Baba's cave' due to the abundance of its natural resources. Consequently, there is no shortage of contenders seeking control over the Arctic's treasures. The Commission on the Limits of Continental Shelf deals with the competing continental shelf claims from a number of circumpolar states. The governments of the 'Arctic 5' (Canada, Norway, Denmark (Greenland), the United States, and Russia) are increasingly competing in the Great Arctic Game.

In geographical terms, Russia is the biggest Arctic state: one third of its territory falls above the Arctic Circle and Russia hopes to further expand its presence in the Arctic region. In December 2001, it submitted a continental shelf claim to the United Nations (Baev, 2010: 6),

but this was returned on the grounds that the UN required more evidence. In March 2014, a UN maritime commission confirmed Russia's right to the possession of 52,000 square km in the Okhotsk Sea.¹ If all outstanding territorial disputes were to be settled in Russia's favour, the country would acquire 45% of the Arctic's territory (Kefferputz, 2010). However, despite being the largest Arctic state, Russia is 'yet to become an Arctic nation' (Medby, 2014: 253).

The Russian Arctic is sparsely populated, and the majority of the Russian population do not necessarily have a sense of belonging to the Arctic. Thus, an identity-building process is a key part of the 'Great Arctic Game': competition over the hearts and minds of national and international audiences. Russian leaders need to create a narrative explaining the significance of the Arctic to the national audience. At the international level, Russia presents itself as a key actor in the region, but at the same time it lacks the necessary economic means to fulfil its national ambitions. Therefore, Russia needs to be careful in defining its place in relation to the remaining Arctic states (the 'Other') in order to ensure that its voice is heard and considered during the Arctic race and that invaluable economic and technical collaborations are secured.

This article explores how in the context of the increased importance of the region, Russian leaders use rhetorical means to legitimise the country's natural right to develop the Arctic, providing a justification for Russian policies in the region for the national and international audiences. The article explores the link between identity and policy, and contributes to the existing discussion on the interdependence between identity-building and Arctic politics (see: Dodds, 2011; Medby, 2014; Williams, 2011). To achieve this aim, it employs a discourse analysis of 109 documents published on the Russian President's official website (www.kremlin.ru) within the 2008-2015 timeframe. The discourse analysis is supported by detailed study of relevant laws and decrees as well as media articles and secondary sources. The article argues that whilst for the national audience the official narrative emphasises the strong historical connection with the region (which is supported by references to the popular idea of Russia as a 'Great Power'); for the international audience Russia is forced to stay within the discursive realm of diplomacy, where international cooperation will bring more tangible benefits to the region (due to the existing lack of economic and military capabilities) than a policy of open hostility and isolation.

Identity and Russia's Arctic policy

¹ Other territorial requests (which include the extensive territory from Russia's acknowledged Arctic territories and up to the North Pole) still need further consideration and investigation.

Governments of the Arctic states in their competition to claim control over the resource-rich region often resort to identity-building policies to gain support among national and international communities (Medby 2014). Identity is a complex and multidimensional concept, and can mean different things in social science or in popular discourse (Dittmer and Dodds 2008). For this study, identity is understood as ‘the self-conception of communities and of individuals identifying themselves as members of the community’ (Buzan *et al* 1998: 119). This approach helps us to understand not only how one defines one’s belonging to a certain group, but also the parameters of the exclusion of the ‘others’ (the out-group) and relations between the ‘others’ and the members of the community (the in-group) (Evans, 2015; Fierke, 2007).

Benwell and Stokoe (2006: 130) state that ‘we live in the storytelling society’ and ‘it is in narrative that we construct identities’. Thus, narrators use discursive and symbolic means to create a version of reality most suitable to their interests (*ibid*). The narratives can be produced and disseminated by a variety of actors: politicians, intellectuals, and mass media (De Cillia *et al.*, 1999). This article focuses on the narrative constructed by the Russian state leaders in the texts published on the President's official website over a seven year period.

The reviewed sample of official texts reveals that the Arctic plays multiple purposes in Russian identity-construction. Russian leaders need not only to communicate the ‘uniqueness’ of Russia as compared to other Arctic states, but also the significance of the Arctic to the national audience. This construction of the ‘Arctic myth’ is not a new phenomenon and for a long period of time it occupied a very important place in Soviet culture (McCannon 1998: 9). In modern days, the development of Arctic policy has become one of the elements of the re-defined identity of the post-communist Russia which has been an ongoing struggle for state leaders since the collapse of the Soviet Union (Light, 2003; Malinova, 2014).

What defines the ‘new’ Russia? For example, neither in Imperial Russia nor in the USSR had state leaders used ethnicity as a uniting factor (Duncan, 2005). Russia’s historical and current ethnic diversity eliminated the option of using ethno-nationalism as an official identity construction strategy (*ibid*). Undoubtedly, the notion of ‘great power’ is one of the invariable elements of Russian identity (Tolz, 2001). The ‘great power’ aspirations derive from the memories of Russian ‘greatness’ in the past (Imperial Russia; the USSR). Particularly, the image of the Soviet superpower’s status is firmly grounded in Russian collective memory (Clunan, 2009). In the 1990s, Russia suffered from the so-called ‘negative identity’, when the out-group (the West) did not recognise Russia as a powerful actor – the desired image for the

in-group (the Russian population) (Evans, 2015: 401). As a result, all presidents of modern Russia tried to establish a 'positive identity' for Russia – to re-gain 'great power' status. Using the language of social identity theory, the three presidents used different strategies of identity management: from attempts to adopt Western values to get desired recognition, to the refusal to accept Western societies 'as the source of moral and political standards for Russia' (Evans, 2015: 401). Social identity theory defines the former as social mobility, and the latter as social creativity (Clunan, 2009: 82). Yeltsin and Medvedev preferred the strategy of social mobility, whereas Putin's strategy is more consistent with the ideas of social creativity. Yeltsin focused on denouncing the communist past in favour of democratic values (Evans, 2015). Medvedev placed emphasis on closer cooperation with the West (ibid). Putin preferred to use history to create the narrative of Russian greatness and uniqueness. In this narrative, the West is often presented as 'the other': trying to undermine Russia's position internationally, and threatening traditional Russian values. These strategies are used on both the macro- and micro-level: for Russia in general, and in relation to separate policy areas. This article demonstrates the evolution of the official narrative of Russian 'Arcticness' between 2008 and 2015: how Russian Arctic policy is explained in the context of ongoing competition for the Arctic's treasures with 'the other' (the other Arctic states).

Russia and the Arctic: context

In the last few centuries, the understanding and value of the Arctic underwent a rapid change. After appealing to 19th-century explorers in their 'search for new land and resources', in the 20th century, the Arctic was seen as being 'the shortest distance between two superpowers' (Keskitalo, 2012), making the area a highly militarised and securitised territory (Gorenburg, 2011). The exploration of the North also became a powerful tool of Stalinist propaganda, focusing on the heroism of the Soviet People 'which conquered one of the world's most extreme natural environments' (Laruelle, 2014: 27, see also Josephson 2014, McCannon 1998). Whilst holding a significant strategic role during the Soviet era (Lakhtine, 1930; Zenzinov, 1944), the Arctic lost its position of importance in Russia's state policy during perestroika and then in the following collapse of the USSR (Fenenko, 2012a). For more than 15 years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russian leaders hardly paid any attention to the development of the national legal base regulating the exploration of the Arctic region (Zhukov, 2015). In the 1990s, the Arctic was mentioned in the law-making process mainly as part of a broader political agenda. For instance, in 1997 Boris Yeltsin approved the Federal Target Programme 'Global Ocean' (1997). Section 9 of the Programme defines Russian national interests and priorities in

the Arctic. In 1998, the State Duma was presented with a draft of the Federal Law on the Arctic Territory of the Russian Federation (Zhukov, 2015). However, the law has never been approved and the Arctic region continued to be a largely absent issue in the Russian legislation until Medvedev approved the 'Foundations of Russia's Arctic policy' (2008). Therefore, only in the 2000s, the Arctic regained its political and economic value for Russia, which made the country one of the most important players in Arctic politics. It has also 'refuelled' the state's desire to be seen as an 'Arctic Great Power' both domestically and internationally, leading Russia to use identity-building rhetoric as a way to frame the Arctic in Russian political discourse.

It should be noted that the Russian Arctic and sub-Arctic regions already produce 98% of Russia's diamonds, 90% of its oil, gas, nickel, cobalt and platinum, 60% of its copper and 24% of its gold – the extraction of which provides 11% of Russia's GDP (Magomedov, 2013). Additionally, the Northern Sea Route (NSR) has the potential to halve the distance between the Far East and Europe, the Arctic could also help to avoid the possible dangers arising from piracy (Blunden, 2012). The variations in the timing of ice melting and the absence of trade opportunities for ships on their way from Asia to Europe restrain the NSR's development (Magomedov, 2013).

Despite the benefits of the Arctic's resources for Russia, there are challenges which might prevent the country from succeeding in the 'race for the "treasures of the Arctic"' (Morozov, 2012: 24). Due to the Arctic's severe climate conditions, the extraction of oil will become profitable only if the price of oil exceeds \$100/barrel (Ortung, 2011: 8), which has become less likely in the current political context with global oil prices falling throughout 2014 and 2015. Hence, it makes more sense for Russia to keep exploring its resources in other, more accessible areas.

Another important topic is the question of international cooperation on Arctic-related issues. Some of Russia's past decisions regarding the region have been seen as controversial. In August 2007, Russia planted a titanium flag on the Arctic seabed. This symbolic gesture provoked a wave of media attention and negative reaction from the international community: 'the dangerous mission prompted ridicule and scepticism among other contenders for the Arctic's energy wealth, with Canada comparing it to a 15th century colonial land grab' (Parfitt, 2007). However, the official aim of this approximately \$60 million expedition was to carry out scientific research in order to support Russia's application for extending its Arctic boundaries (Kefferputz, 2010). In a recent interview to foreign journalists Putin once again articulated the Russian position on the incident (RF 24/05/2014):

This was not a state action, it was rather an emotional action. I don't see anything horrible in it. Americans landed on the moon and planted their flag. We are not arguing with them because they did it and don't tell them that they claimed the moon.

After the 'flag' incident, Russia turned towards a more cooperative policy by accepting bilateral and multilateral agreements with other Arctic nations (Orttung, 2011). Still Russian Arctic policy is often criticised in the Western media which focuses on Russia's military activities, ultimately raising tension amongst the international community in a way that is reminiscent of the Cold War militarisation of the region (Wilson Rowe 2013). However, as Kefferputz (2010: 2) suggests, Russia's 'multi-dimensional' approach to the Arctic reflects 'not only the numerous different Russian interests in the region but also the influence of intangibles such as ideas and identity on Russian policy-making'. Indeed, Russia's claims over the North have great support amongst the electorate and increase the popularity of politicians at all levels (ibid). The idea of Russia's 'Northerners' and national pride of associating itself with the Arctic is also stated in the 'Foundations of Russia's Arctic policy' (2008). The document claims that by 2020 the Arctic ought to become Russia's leading strategic resource base, helping Russia to maintain its role of an 'Arctic Great Power'. Laruelle (2011: 63) states that 'in Russia, the conquest of the High North is an identity-building project'. Arguably, this could be a way to justify Russia's claims to have priority rights to use the Arctic's treasures.

Based on this premise, the study explores how this 'identity-building project' is constructed in the official discourse in which Russian state leaders present their vision of the Arctic and its place in Russia's state policy (foreign and domestic). It also aims to understand what the important components of the Russian Arctic policy are and how they are articulated to the national and international audiences.

Methodological considerations

Discourse analysis allows us to de-construct the 'national-identity narratives' (De Cillia et al. 1999: 152) and to understand how the states (in our case the Russian state) frame the Arctic and how through the use of certain linguistic tools state leaders create a narrative of Russian 'Arcticness' (Medby, 2014: 253).

Here, discourse is seen as a representation of political and social interactions (Fairclough, 2001: 122), whilst discourse analysis looks at the language as an embodiment of the 'linguistic conceptualization of the world' (Fairclough *et al.*, 2011: 358). Realising the complexity and

diversity of discourse analysis as a theory and methodology, this study is based on one particular approach – political discourse analysis (PDA) which ‘focuses on the reproduction and contestation of political power through political discourse’ (Fairclough & Fairclough 2012: 17). It should be noted that the ‘political’ attribute of discourse in this case is understood as ‘attached to political actors’ (ibid), where the ‘forms of text and talk have political functions and implications’ (van Dijk, 1997: 14). Jensen and Skedsmo (2010: 441) argue that the Russian government’s ‘white papers’ ‘both have and generate power by being perceived as relevant and important enough to participate and take centre stage in such important discourses’. Therefore, the texts produced on behalf of the President of Russia are perceived as representations of discourse shaping the nature of the state’s Arctic policy for it to be supported by the Russian audience.

PDA allows us to critically assess the ‘tools’ used by Russian officials in their linguistic conceptualisation of the Arctic. For instance, Russian leaders in their speeches refer to a broad range of symbolic images to justify Russia’s policy in the region. One of the important narratives applied is Russia’s historical and geographical presence in the Arctic. This assertion is arguably based partly on Russia’s extensive Arctic coast and partly on the collective memory of Soviet propaganda regarding ‘Red Arctic’ (Laruelle, 2014: 27, McCannon 1998). As is demonstrated below, these widely recognized images are used to justify exclusive Russian rights to the economic benefits of Arctic exploration.

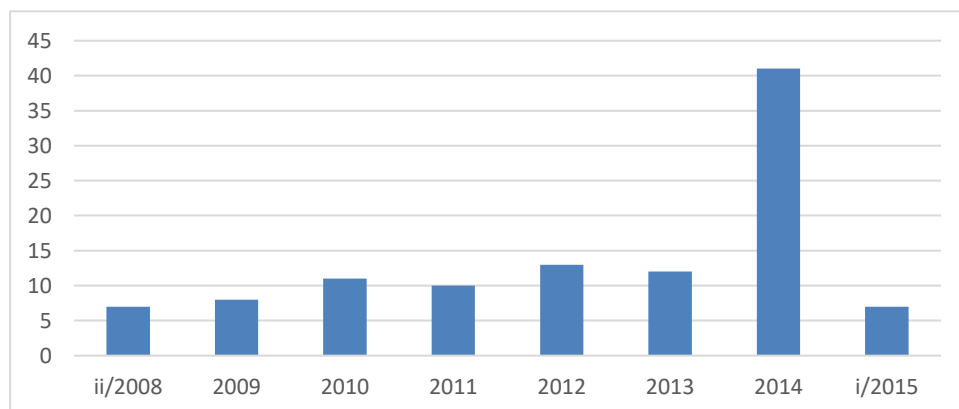
Overall, in order to understand the ways in which the Arctic is conceptualised and positioned in the rhetoric of the Russian government, this article analyses texts from the President of Russia’s official website (www.kremlin.ru) which publishes the President’s official speeches, interviews, statements, transcripts of meetings and so on. The audience in this case is multifaceted as the documents are addressed to indigenous people, Russian and international journalists, diplomats, policy makers, leaders of other states, scientists and the general public. Furthermore, taking into consideration that the texts are openly available through the internet, the boundaries of the audience become even more obscure. Even though the role of the audience in the process of linguistic conceptualisation of the region is very important, for the purpose of this paper we are concentrating specifically on the rhetorical and symbolic means used by the ‘speakers’ to gain the acceptance of this varying audience.

The search was restricted to a seven-year timeframe (June 2008 - May 2015), totalling 109 publications that mention ‘Arctic’ (the keywords ‘*Arktika*’ and ‘*Arkticheskii*’ were applied in all their possible grammatical variations). The selected timeframe demonstrates the most

recent developments in Russian Arctic policy and, at the same time, provides an interesting comparison between Medvedev's orientation towards a policy of modernisation and international dialogue, and Putin's nationalistic approach which mostly relies on the defence of national interests and promotion of the country's political and economic independence (Sakwa 2014). As discussed above, since the mid-2000s Russian Arctic policy has revived – after a temporary decline in the 1990s (McCannon 2012), and it is during this time that the region has successfully re-entered the official Russian discourse. The potential limitations of the restricted timeframe have been mitigated by reviewing the relevant pre-2008 legislative documents.

Figure 1 demonstrates that the majority of the presidential texts are evenly distributed over the studied period, however, 2014 significantly stands out with 41 publications. This 'abnormality' coincided with the major political and economic changes in Russia provoked by the military conflict in Eastern Ukraine, which signifies a special role of the Arctic in Russian foreign and domestic politics.

Figure 1. Overall number of analysed texts.



The analytical guideline for processing the collected data was adapted from Siegfried Jager (2001: 55) with some adjustments to the analysis of the Russian Arctic policy represented within the official discourse. Each text/article was manually coded. In order to diminish errors and achieve greater reliability of the results, all data was double-coded. The analysis includes the following stages. Firstly, we identified the 'institutional framework', the reason the document was produced (e.g. a speech at an international summit) which subsequently influenced the purpose of the text. The text's 'surface' has allowed us to look at its structural components: headlines, the sequence of the paragraphs, the introduction of various themes, and how the Arctic enters the discussion – for example, as a main subject of the statement or as one political issues mentioned among others and, therefore, its importance has to be considered

within these structural constraints. The analysis of the rhetorical means showed how the meaning was constructed through linguistic means – use of metaphors, re-emphasis of specific vocabulary, argumentation strategies (e.g. repetitive use of the concept of ‘Russian Arcticness’). The ‘ideological statement’ category identified how each document reflected Russia’s position towards the Arctic (e.g. a natural right to execute ownership over the region). Finally, based on the analysis of all these elements, each document has been localised within the broader discourse strand (‘flows of discourse that centre on a common topic’ (Jager & Maier, 2009: 46)). Based on the conducted analysis and identified semantic and notional commonalities within the studied body of texts, five strands were identified: ‘international dialogue’, ‘environmental protection’, ‘an Arctic state’, ‘national security’ and ‘economic development’. Table 1 provides examples of how each stage of the coding process allowed us to locate the text within a certain category.

Table 1. Discursive categories with the examples

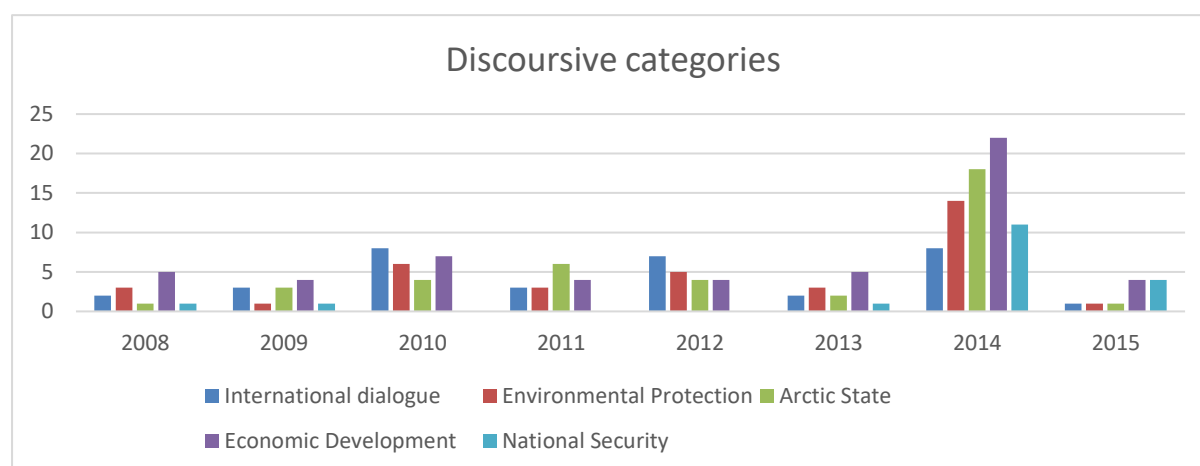
| | <i>Institutional framework</i> | <i>Text ‘surface’</i> | <i>Rhetorical means</i> | <i>Ideological statements</i> |
|---------------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>International Dialogue</i> | Meeting with foreign officials | One of the items of discussions | ‘it is not a politics of “racing” but a policy of cooperation’ | Cooperation stimulates Arctic development |
| <i>Environmental Protection</i> | Meeting with scientists | One of the items of discussion | ‘unique Arctic nature’ | Russia is heavily involved in cleaning the Arctic |
| <i>Arctic State</i> | Meeting with veterans | No obvious relation to the theme of the document | ‘We should be recognised as an Arctic superpower, the state which is not there by chance, but by right’ | The Arctic is an integral part of the Russian political, economic and social realm |
| <i>Economic Development</i> | Opening speech (business summit) | One of the central issues discussed | ‘our most important goal is to turn the Arctic into a Russian resource base of the 21 st century’ | Russia’s inherent right to the resources which are central to its economic development |
| <i>National Security</i> | Security Council meeting | Appears next to the Ukrainian conflict | ‘in Arctic all aspects of national security concentrate’ | Russia is not militarising the region, but protecting its national interests |

It should be noted that the same text falls into various categories if it contains more than one of the ‘discourse fragments’ (Jager & Maier, 2009: 47). Furthermore, each category is not homogeneous and, in some cases, it can contain texts with contradictory messages. For example, the ‘environmental protection’ strand might include both texts promoting Arctic environmental conservation and neglecting it.

Analysis

The redistribution of the identified discursive categories (Figure 2) shows how framing of the Arctic in the Russian political discourse has been altered over the years. Evidently, some categories such as ‘international dialogue’ and, especially, ‘economic development’ consistently take the lead, whilst others such as ‘national security’ or ‘environmental protection’ appear more sporadically depending on the political or economic context. The analysis of the reviewed sample did not determine any significant variation in distribution of the discursive categories during the presidencies of Medvedev and Putin.

Figure 2. Number of the discursive categories over the years.



The close study of the texts has allowed us to analyse the role and significance of each category as well as to discuss the possible reasons for these patterns.

An Arctic State

In total, 37% of the documents (N=39) contain references to Russia as an Arctic state (see figure 2). These documents focus on such subjects as the scientific development of the Arctic, culture and the lifestyle of the ethnic groups living in the Arctic, and the ‘Russian national idea’. The corpus develops the argument of Russia’s ‘Arcticness’ (Medby, 2014: 253) which further evolves into an even greater concept of Russia being an Arctic Great Power: ‘we are a natural Arctic state’, (RF 28/11/2011); ‘the Arctic is our region, our coastal lines and maritime

spaces' (RF 11/11/2011). Arguably, presenting the country as the epitome of an Arctic state provides justification for Russian policy in the region: at the national level, reproducing Arctic identity; whilst at the international level, justifying assertive actions.

There are two central themes in this discursive category: geographical location, and social and cultural factors. Both factors have strong symbolic power and are widely recognised and supported by the Russian population (FOM 2015). Firstly, Russian Arctic territory is not restricted by the Arctic circle, but includes greater territories originally defined by the Soviet government in 1926 and re-defined in 2014 in a Presidential Decree (N296, 2/05/2014). Secondly, some of the documents aim to demonstrate that the Arctic region is deeply integrated into Russian culture and society.

The Arctic region is framed 'as a Russian national territory and not an "ethno-region"' (Laruelle, 2014: 39). The region is mentioned in relation to a number of cultural events celebrating ethnic groups living in the Arctic region (RF 24/08/2012). For example, the need to support reindeer farming which is 'a significant part of life for a large number of our people' (RF 18/05/2011). The indigenous people blame major extracting companies (Gazprom, Norilsk Nickel) for pasture degradation (Laruelle, 2014: 39). In the 2000s, the Kremlin has tried to act as a defender of local population, and to promote the possibility of the coexistence of indigenous trades and the industrial production in the region. Overall, the culture and lifestyle of the indigenous people of the Arctic region are presented as an integral part of Russian society, but not as a core, defining element of the Russian Arctic, therefore, it does not alienate the rest of the population which do not belong to an ethnic Arctic minority.

The belief in Russia's 'Arctic exceptionalism' also comes from the conviction that only this country has the necessary experience and knowledge to contribute to the economic and social development of the region and to the protection of its ecosystem. For example, Russia's leading role in the scientific exploration of the Arctic is emphasised (RF 8/05/2011). By highlighting how Russian people of different professional backgrounds, age and gender are involved in the exploration of the Arctic (e.g. RF 8/05/2011; RF 25/05/2013) the political narrative helps to present the remote region as an integral part of Russia. This in turn provides a justification (in the opinion of Russian state leaders) for ensuring that other countries interested in the exploration of the Arctic should 'coordinate their actions with Russian national interests' (RF 28/11/2011).

Overall, the analysed texts illustrate how Russian leaders use references to historical and cultural presence in the region as an identity-building mechanism which allows them to justify proactive (often resource-demanding) Arctic policies. Political leaders, emphasising the key role of the Arctic in Russian political, economic and cultural life, define Russia's priorities in the region and establish the borderlines between 'us' and 'them' in the Arctic where 'them' can be presented by either the other states or, as discussed below, by the previous Russian state formations. By establishing the Russian 'Arcticness', speakers do not leave the option of not getting involved in Arctic politics since 'Russia is the Arctic'. The claim is based on Russia's 'current and historic presence in the Arctic' (RF 12/12/2012); the fact that it has the longest Arctic coastline and Russia's continuous contribution to the economic, environmental and scientific development of the Arctic.

Environmental Protection

The discursive category of 'environmental protection' was identified in 33% of the texts (N=36) (see Figure 2) which predominately concentrate on issues of environmental pollution of the Russian Arctic used for fossil fuel extraction or nuclear waste disposal and storage. The Arctic is often referred to as a unique and fragile ecosystem (RF 9/06/2011), which has to be treated with caution. Emphasis is made on the financial help provided by the state for the clearing operations (with almost 2.5 billion roubles allocated from the federal budget for 2012, 2013 and 2014) (RF 30/07/2012) or other government's environmental initiatives (e.g. giving a part of Russian Arctic the status of a national park). One can be sceptical of how effective these measures are, but as Ebinger and Zambetakis (2009: 1229) note they can 'signal that Russia apparently believes it has more to gain by following international law and demonstrating ecological sensitivity than by aggressively asserting its sovereignty'.

In some instances, anxiety over the Arctic's environmental degradation coincides with Russia's economic interest where 'sustainable development of the region' becomes of high importance (RF 6/08/2011, RF 22/01/2013). The environment is also discussed within the context of international cooperation with Russia either helping the international community in 'preserving the unique nature of the Arctic' (RF 7/08/2011) or emphasising the necessity of international support in environmental solutions (RF 9/06/2011).

One of the striking issues concerning this category is the frequent use of the dichotomy 'we-they', where 'they' are 'previous generations' which have polluted the Arctic, whilst 'we' is a modern Russian state (e.g. RF 30/07/2012) which 'inherited' all these problems from the

USSR. Interestingly, in this case ‘we’ does not just refer to the national ‘we’ of Russians, as an opposition to everyone who is ‘non-Russian’; instead ‘we’ makes a distinction between different historical periods of the same state (which technically can include the same people). As Petersoo argues, ‘what does ‘we’ really mean in any particular case remains open for speculation and interpretation, and whether the ‘we’ always perform a nationalising role is also questionable’ (2007: 433). Wodak (2012: 216) writes that rhetorical means are used to shape group identity and define similarities and differences between ‘us’ and ‘others’, or identity construction through exclusion. We identified two examples of ‘the other’ in the selected sample of texts. Boundaries are drawn between the Russian Federation and the Soviet Union, and between Russia and the other Arctic states. In the first case, previous generations are blamed for endangering the vulnerable environment of the Arctic region, then modern Russia is presented as a ‘protector of the environment’. In the second case, the texts illustrate the instrumental use of identity-centred rhetoric to underline again the message that the ‘Arctic is Russia’ (and vice versa) which does not leave any room for doubt about involvement into Arctic politics, thus any economic or human resources invested in the region are justified.

The Arctic was named a ‘climate change hot spot’ (Anisimov & Reneva, 2006: 169), the consequences of which might bring tragic outcomes for the Earth’s ecosystem (Ebinger & Zambetakis, 2009). However, within the studied texts, climate change was mentioned only in five of them. One of the texts is a transcript of a Russian Security Council meeting on climate change (RF 17/03/2010), during which the Arctic is mentioned as an example of how climate change can lead to international confrontations. It could be argued that in this case Russian leaders use climate change rhetoric to define Russia's role in the broader Arctic region, and again to draw on differences between ‘us’ and ‘them’ (the other Arctic states).

The limited discussion of climate change can be explained by Russia’s overall somewhat questionable climate policy, which is often defined by the state’s economic agenda and political interests (Andonova, 2008; Korppoo & Vatansever, 2012). Instead, concentrating on Russia’s policy of cleaning the Arctic from ‘inherited’ waste, environmental discourse in this case contributes to the creation of the new state identity, which cannot be blamed for the previous mischief of the USSR. Interestingly, if we compare the ‘Arctic state’ and the ‘environmental protection’ categories, we can observe how the historical references in the identity-building strategies can be used in different ways, by either emphasising deep historical connections with the region or underlining the new era of Russian policy in the Arctic. The cleaning operations do not only find vast support among the Russian people, national media and even academic

community (Lukin 2013), but, it can also be argued that, by ‘cleaning its premises’, Russia exercises its ownership over the Arctic without causing confrontation with the international community.

International dialogue

This discursive category includes 31% of texts (N=34) which discuss the Arctic in the context of international cooperation or, on the contrary, in the context of Russia’s unwillingness to allow anyone else to be involved (Figure 2). In the majority of cases, the ‘institutional framework’ for the texts became meetings between the Russian President and leaders of other states (predominately members of the Arctic Council). The Arctic is frequently called a ‘priority direction’ (RF 1/08/2012) in cooperation between respective countries, which will contribute to a ‘single economic space in the Arctic’ (RF 30/11/2010).

There are a number of texts devoted to the maritime delimitation treaty² between Russia and Norway on settling boundaries in the Barents Sea (e.g. RF 10/02/2011; 27/04/2010). Several months before the agreement was officially signed, then Russian President Dmitry Medvedev (RF 27/04/2010) stated that ‘boundaries have to be settled so the resources can be accessed’ and that ‘it is not a politics of “racing” but a policy of cooperation in order to achieve common goals’. Despite this positive discourse, the outcome of the agreement was not supported and was even criticised in Russia³ due to the way it supposedly contradicted Russian interests (Poval, 2012). In this case, the opinion of the national audience was sacrificed to ‘strategic benefits’, which made Norway accept Russian Arctic borders and ‘reduced the risk of interaction between Oslo, Ottawa and Washington on an anti-Russian basis’ (Fenenko, 2012a).

Interestingly, in some cases, the ambiguous situation of the Arctic’s status in international relations is also mentioned through comparison of the Arctic with other ‘sensitive issues’ such as Afghanistan (RF 23/03/2012) suggesting that it is either an equally important or equally sensitive and difficult item of international security. Besides, in some cases the ‘dialogue’ comes down to confrontation and the protection of Russian national interests (RF 17/03/2010).

² The history of the Russian-Norwegian border dispute has stretched over decades (official re-negotiations started in 1970) (Poval, 2012).

³ During the ratification of the agreement, 57 (out of 368) members of the Russian lower chamber of the parliament (the Duma) voted against it. These were mostly opposition parties who were concerned with why Russia should give up its territories and its resources – ‘it is not like we lost the war’ (Lukin 2012: 400).

It is clear that Russia takes a firm stance on its own ‘sovereignty and legitimacy’ in the region (this issue will be elaborated on in the next sub-section). Therefore, this links us back to the idea of the Arctic as a natural Russian state.

The discursive category of ‘international dialogue’ is interesting in a sense that it mostly demonstrates Russia’s cooperative attitude towards the Arctic (at least in the official discourse). This supports the argument of Wilson Rowe and Blakkisrud (2014: 67) who state that ‘the Arctic [...] is well-established in Russian political discourse and foreign policy practice as an international relations “zone”’. Even though the degree of cooperation and collaboration with other states could be disputed, but as Dodds (2010: 71) points out with regards to the Ilulissat Declaration acceptance, ‘the use of words such as “we” is highly significant in expressing a form of geo-power’. This statement could be applied to the discussed situation – it is ‘highly significant’ that Russia shares ownership of the Arctic with other states, and both Presidents Putin and Medvedev frequently suggested a policy of cooperation, rather than confrontation in the region.

This unfolds the following dilemma in Russian Arctic policy where for the national audience the official discourse paints a picture of the assertive Russian Arctic policy. Whilst for the international community (without which the economic development of the region becomes extremely complicated) the narrative revolves around the ideas of cooperation and legal ways of resolving any disputes. This ‘dilemma’ could be explained by the clash between the state’s (mostly economic) needs and the public opinion (which was evident during the signing of the delimitation treaty with Norway) and could be attributed to the failure of the political discourse’s ability to manage both audiences.

‘National Security’

Until the start of 2014 national security did not receive a lot of attention in the analysed sample of texts where only a few speeches mentioned the ‘danger of the militarization of the Arctic’ (RF 27/02/2013). However, since 2014 national security and Arctic militarisation became more prominent in Russian official discourse (Figure 2). During a Security Council meeting President Putin underlined that ‘here [in the Arctic] all aspects of national security concentrate: military-political, economic, technological, environmental and resource ones’ (RF 22/04/2014), therefore, it is important to ensure the protection of Russian Arctic borders. The last point is also mentioned in the context of the unstable international situation with ‘some

countries’⁴ pursuing the offensive policy of ‘unrestricted pre-emptive actions’, as a result ‘the chance of conflicts increases in the strategically important regions for Russia’ (RF 9/04/2015).

This coincided with the increasing Russian military presence in the Arctic. For example in 2014 Russia announced its intention to strengthen air defence in the region (RIA Novosti, 2014). In the same year, a battalion of 350 Russian paratroopers carried out a practice landing on the New Siberian Islands (ITAR-TASS, 2014) which was followed by a convoy of ships sent to these islands in order to re-open Russia’s military base. Russia is not unique in this policy of Arctic militarisation (Konyshev & Sergunin 2012) and there are different opinions on the nature of increased Russian military presence in the region. It has received predominantly critical/negative coverage in foreign media (Redpath 2014). In contrast, national media supported the official discourse that re-building military infrastructure in the Arctic is not an offensive move, but to ensure the security of the NSR for everyone (Egorov 2014). This observation supports Keil’s (2014: 170) argument, that the main target audience of this ‘military muscle-stretching’ is the Russian public, rather than the international community. It can be interpreted as part of ‘Russia’s plan to return to great-power status’ (ibid: 169), at least in its own eyes.

State officials in their speeches stress that it is not a ‘militarisation’ of the Arctic as such but the protection of national interests. The contradictory idea of a non-militarised securitisation of the Russian Arctic surfaces throughout various texts. For example, in his conversation with Russian students, Putin re-enforces the official justification of the earlier mentioned landing of the Russian paratroopers in the Arctic (RF 19/12/2014):

Recently, the landing of the military paratroopers took place – peaceful, but a military one. It is our territory, we will be reviving there all this military infrastructure, infrastructure of the MCHS [Ministry of Emergency] because we need to provide secure passages for convoys of ships and trading routes, and not for the sake of engaging in a war with someone or start a conflict.

These discursive changes have coincided with the development of the conflict in Eastern Ukraine. Interestingly, the Arctic and Crimea sometimes are mentioned in the same statements as one of the priorities in Russia’s national security (e.g. RF 19/11/2014). Similarly, Russian

⁴ It could be suggested that the President was referring to the USA and its allies (who according to the official Russian position are in charge of steering troubles in various countries and particularly in Ukraine).

officials stress that despite any accusations Russia is not going to engage in an open conflict, so the changes in its Northern frontier should be treated just as a ‘flexing of muscles’. If in the Ukrainian conflict this explanation is widely disputed (with some suggesting Russia’s active military involvement), in the Arctic case due to the gap in capabilities and very different national agendas it might make more sense for the interested parties. The ‘non-militarising securitisation’ of the Russian Arctic is important not so much to its actual security but to its identity as a strong state (especially, during a period of political and economic sanctions) targeting people inside the country.

Golts (2011: 59) states that even though the Arctic is a space where the interests of former rivals (Russia and the USA) ‘clash’, the disputes can only re-create the ‘parody of cold war’. Dittmer et al. (2011: 205) point out that the geographical characteristics of the far north contributes to the ‘relatively little chance of actual combat’ between the states, despite disagreements over territorial claims. From the Russian perspective, the desire to avoid an open conflict can be explained not only by shortcomings in the state’s military resources (Kovalev & Gainutdinova 2012), but mostly through the need for cooperation in the Arctic, where exploration requires foreign technologies, investment and access to export markets (Gorenburg 2011). Therefore, the international audience should perceive this discourse of securitisation with scepticism, considering how extremely limited the chance of a real threat coming from the country in the region is.

Economic Development

This category is perhaps the most important in terms of the protection of Russian interests and it proved to be the most popular one with over 50% of the analysed texts (N=55) referring to it (Figure 2). The category can be divided into two overlapping subtopics: the NSR and the Arctic as the resource base.

The texts continuously describe the Arctic’s ‘strategic importance’ to stress the role of the region in the Russian economy (e.g. RF 14/04/2010, RF 21/05/2013). The commercially viable maritime routes can link Russian mining industries with major international markets (Blunden, 2012). Therefore, it is only logical that some texts urge Russia’s active participation in the development of the NSR to ensure and strengthen its position in the Arctic (e.g. RF 11/11/2011). The ‘strategic importance’ is also connected with Russia’s energy security where the Arctic is seen as ‘a Russian resource base of the 21st century’ (RF 17/09/2008).

The importance of the Arctic for the Russian economy is reflected in the Russian

legislation (Russian government, 2009: 78). This is not surprising considering that, according to estimates, '25% of the world's undiscovered oil and gas reserves could lie under the Arctic Ocean' (Smith & Gilles, 2007: 1), and Russia controls territory potentially containing 8.2 billion barrels of oil and gas reserves (Bahgat, 2010: 16). The gas reserves are especially important for the future of the Russian energy sector. It is estimated that the share of natural gas in the global energy mix will increase from 21% to 24% by 2040 (Guliyev and Ruzakova, 2015: 80) and Russia plans to retain its position as one of the key players on the international hydrocarbon markets (Russian government, 2009: 22). The climate specifications of the region can slow down the development of the energy resources in the Russian Arctic. In addition, Russia lacks the necessary technology for the deep-water drilling necessary in the Arctic (Fenenko, 2012b). This factor is significantly underestimated, if not misrepresented in the analysed texts.

On a number of occasions, the texts refer to what is presented as the 'unique' experience and skills of Russian energy companies working on the exploration of Arctic resources (RF 21/05/2013, RF 21/06/2013). These texts mainly refer to the oil and gas fields already discovered in the Barents, Pechora and Kara Seas, and in the Timan-Pechora basin (Bahgat, 2010: 170). It is underlined that only Russian companies can fulfil these 'projects' (RF 23/05/2014). In reality, some of the mentioned projects (including the exploration of the new supergiant Shtokhman field in the Barents Sea) faced major technological and investment setbacks in the last couple of years (Kapyła & Mikkola, 2013). Russia struggled with acquiring the necessary technology and expertise for efficient exploration of energy reserves in the extreme climate conditions (Bahgat, 2010). The economic sanctions imposed on Russia have worsened the situation. That forced Western energy companies to limit their participation in the new exploration projects (Rutland, 2014). Additionally, the sanctions limited the ability of Russian energy companies to get international loans (Shirov et al., 2015). Altogether, the Russian economy could lose up to \$15 billion a year due to the disruption of economic ties between Russia and the West in the energy sector (Ibid). Despite Russian attempts to find new partners capable of assisting Russian companies with offshore deep water drilling operations, the sanctions 'could cause a 25% drop in Russian output by 2025' (Rutland, 2014: 5).

This difference between the 'real' turn of events and their representation by the Russian leaders can be explained by their attempts to support the image of Russia as a 'strong' Arctic player mostly for the domestic audience. Russian political discourse should emphasise the importance of balancing between competition and cooperation in the Russian Arctic (Wilson

Rowe 2012) since this is important for gaining public support for the international cooperation in the region. This category explains to the national audience why the exploration of the Arctic is worthwhile and why the current efforts will bring long-term benefits. In this case, identity-building tools are applied in order to achieve further tangible gains.

In 2014 when Russia, with its specific position in the Ukrainian conflict, entered the shaky ground of becoming an international antagonist, references to ‘economic development’ peaked and far surpassed all other categories (including the national security one). It seems quite natural that in times of economic sanction the state has turned its head to the new avenues of potential economic stability. But, it is also important to note that in front of the international audience (for example, during meetings with the foreign leaders or journalists) economic development in the Arctic is often mentioned in the context of international cooperation where even the delimitation agreement with Norway is seen as a contribution to future prosperity. This makes the idea of an open military conflict in the Arctic even more unlikely, despite the fact that for the Russian audience the state’s full capacity to develop the Arctic on its own terms is consistently underlined.

Conclusion

Dittmer et al. (2011: 205) argue that ‘it is not just the Arctic’s climate that is changing [...], but rather that the region is being reconstituted within a discursive formation’. As recent news show (RIA Novosti, 2015; Zykova, 2014) the Arctic remains an important item on the Russian political agenda and it is very likely that its prominence will only increase over time as the economic recession stimulates greater interest in the region. At the same time, the forceful national discourse on positioning itself as the ‘Arctic Great Power’ correlates with strong public support (FOM 2015) for a more assertive Arctic policy. We conclude that for Russia the establishing the homogeneous identity of an ‘Arctic state’ is important for ensuring a leading place in competition for the Arctic's exploration (King Ruel, 2011).

De Cillia et al. (1999: 154) note that ‘the construction of national identity builds on the emphasis of a common history’. Indeed, the conducted analysis demonstrates that Russian leaders emphasise the historical connection between Russia and the Arctic and, in fact, position the state as a ‘historical’ Arctic Great Power. At the same time, it has been observed that identity is not constant and it can evolve depending on political context and other interests (Wodak, 2012: 217). For instance, within the studied data the traditional military dimension of the Arctic was hardly mentioned until 2014. The change coincides with the current Ukrainian

crisis and the state's subsequent diminished status in international affairs, which was followed by a series of sanctions and exclusions from major international organisations. The impact of external factors over Russian Arctic policy was also evident in the discursive categories of 'international dialogue' and 'economic development', where the political and economic restrictions or motivations have swayed Russia towards the policy of 'forced diplomacy' in the region.

Russian leaders need to not only communicate the 'uniqueness' of Russia as compared to other Arctic states, but also the significance of the Arctic to the national audience. Here, Russia faces similar problems to other Arctic states.⁵ The Russian Arctic is scarcely populated and stretches across multiple federal districts and it is not enough to claim that 'the Arctic is Russian' when the region is 'undervalued in [...] social, economic, and demographic respects' (Laruelle, 2014: 31). The exploration of the Arctic is greatly centralised, with the main focus being placed on natural resources. At the same time, the indigenous people have little control over the activities of the energy companies in the Arctic region (Steinberg *et al.* 2015). Furthermore, indigenous people and people in the non-Arctic parts of Russia are often separated both geographically and culturally. The narrative created by the state should create the feeling of belonging to the Arctic across the country, and the feeling of belonging to Russia among the indigenous populations of the circumpolar regions.

Therefore, discourse around 'Russian Arcticness' is also influenced by internal processes whereby Russian leaders use multidimensional framing to present the country as a strong powerful state and the Arctic as a 'natural' component of its national identity, which does not leave any room for the domestic audience to start questioning the rationale of its Arctic policy. There is also a continuity in Russian political discourse where the fluctuation in distribution of the texts between discursive categories is insignificant to build strong conclusions about differences in the priorities of Putin's and Medvedev's administrations.

It is also apparent that the discursive construction of the region does not always correspond to the reality of events. In particular, the Russian political discourse aimed at the domestic audience does not necessarily reflect the state's actual economic and foreign policies in the region. Thus, the identity-building narrative does not entirely incorporate the benefits of international cooperation, but highlights the differences between 'us' (a natural Arctic state)

⁵ State leader of both the USA and Denmark have to negotiate the place of their Arctic territories (Greenland and Alaska) to the residents of the non-Arctic regions (Steinberg *et al.* 2015: 105).

and ‘them’ (other Arctic states). In the long-term, it would be important to correct this omission, considering the prominence of international cooperation for the economic development of the Russian Arctic. As the analysis of Russia’s economic and military capabilities shows, it needs to cooperate with other states, as demonstrated through its willingness to follow international norms and regulations with regards to the region. At the same time, the international community (if it would like to try to work with this important but often difficult political actor) should ignore Russia’s ostentatious demonstration of power and try to find common ground in their discourses.

Whilst this paper serves as a solid foundation for developing our understanding of state discourse on Russia’s Arctic policy, some important themes were not within the scope of this analysis. These limitations should be considered in future studies. Firstly, state rhetoric cannot be equated with actual governmental policies, because there is an observed gap between the image portrayed and the state’s capabilities. Secondly, even though this research revealed continuity in Russia’s Arctic policy, the findings are constrained by the seven-year timeframe. National identity is context-dependent and constantly evolving. Collecting data beyond this time limit would allow us to identify long-term trends in the political discourse. Lastly, future research inquiries should aim to approach a more diverse range of data allowing us to see how Russia’s discourse is perceived and interpreted by a range of external actors.

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